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SUBJECT: FORMER MALDIVIAN PRESIDENT MAUMOOM ABDUL GAYOOM'S
RETIREMENT FROM POLITICS AND THE NEW OPPOSITION LEADER

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: At a press conference on January 25, Abdul Maumoom Gayoom, former Maldivian president and leader of the main opposition Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party (DRP), announced his retirement from politics ahead of the party's national congress, stating that it was time for the "younger generation" to take over the helm. On February 2, Ahmed Thasmeen Ali, DRP deputy leader, became the party's new leader after no other members submitted their names for the leadership post. According to party rules, if there is only one candidate for a position, that person is automatically selected. Thasmeen's appointment officially will be endorsed at the party congress on February 20 and 21, where members will also be electing four deputy leaders, a 27 member National Council, and a ten member Party Council. Current party rules state that the DRP leader will also be the party's presidential candidate. The next presidential election is scheduled for mid 2013. END SUMMARY.

PARLIAMENT SPEAKER DETAILS GAYOOM PLANS

12. (SBU) On January 28, Abdulla Shahid, a member of the DRP and Speaker of Maldivian parliament telephoned Ambassador Butenis regarding Gayoom's decision to retire from politics. According to Shahid, Gayoom would endorse Thasmeen as the party's next leader. Shahid requested that Ambassador urge the GOM to respect Gayoom's privileges. Gayoom had reportedly been physically harassed and mobs had shot at his house. Some security was provided by members of the Maldives National Defense Force (MNDF), but once he left the party, Shahid was concerned that Gayoom's status would change, and he would no longer be entitled to certain privileges. On plans after his resignation, Shahid said Gayoom, who was very fit and a proponent of moderate Islam, intended to establish a humanitarian foundation. Gayoom wrote to President Obama after his speech in Cairo and has yet to receive a response.

13. (SBU) On parliamentary issues, Shahid stated that despite having to operate under old rules and the inexperience of new MPs on parliamentary procedures, parliament had a good record, having passed six important bills and debated 20 issues before it broke for recess at the end of 2009. Shahid was optimistic that new rules would limit hours of debate and would provide more time for committee to work on bills submitted for review. Shahid concluded

that if the government encouraged dialogue, it could expect increased cooperation from parliament. The next parliamentary election is scheduled for June 2014.

NEW DRP LEADER AHMED THASMEEN ALI

¶4. (U) Thasmeen, a Member of Parliament, deputy leader of the DRP, and running mate of Gayoom at the 2008 presidential elections, had always been in the running for the DRP leadership. A soft-spoken man, he reportedly gets along well with President Mohamed Nasheed, to whom he talks regularly about parliamentary matters. Some have questioned Thasmeen's selection, with one online blog referring to it as a "coronation, not a congress." Thasmeen is one of the country's wealthiest businessmen, owning several beach resorts and a tuna production company. He has a degree in Economics from Warwick University in the U.K. and a Masters in Political Science from the American University in Cairo. Thasmeen was said to have bankrolled much of the DRP presidential and parliamentary campaigns, gaining him influence with the party. Thasmeen's wife, brother, and sister-in-law are also members of parliament. In 2009, Thasmeen was hit with corruption allegations after an audit of the Bank of Maldives (BML) revealed that 60 percent of loans issued in 2008 were granted to businesses associated with influential political figures, including Thasmeen's tuna production company. In December 2009, a civil court ordered Sultans of the Seas, another company closely associated with Thasmeen to pay the BML over 50 million USD in unpaid loans, fines and accumulated interest.

BUTENIS